

CHICAGO – U.S. Representatives Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Melissa Bean (D-IL), along with state and local suburban leaders, hosted the second hearing of the bipartisan Suburban Transportation Commission today to discuss a proposed tax increase on suburban families, along with funding needs for Metra’s STAR line. Representatives Kirk and Bean were joined by state Sen. Michael Bond, state Rep. Ed Sullivan Jr., Mayors Maria Rodriguez of Long Grove and Bill Gentes of Round Lake, Charlie Eldredge of the McHenry County Economic Development Corporation and Chris Robling of Jayne Thompson & Associates.

“Under proposed legislation, the State of Illinois would increase taxes on collar county families,” Congressman Kirk said. “Half the suburban revenue would go to the RTA and half would return to each county. Of the \$400 million in new suburban tax revenue going to the RTA, 60 percent would be spent on the CTA’s pension deficit. The plan would provide no funds for Metra’s STAR line – leaving federal funding unclaimed – while bailing out the CTA’s pension fund.”

Only one out of five suburban families live within a mile of CTA services. Meanwhile, 83 percent of suburban families live within a mile of Metra or Pace. More than 70 percent of the CTA’s “suburban service” goes to just five communities (Evanston, Skokie, Cicero, Oak Park and Evergreen Park). Fifteen major suburban communities contribute to the CTA’s spending but get no service.

Under SB 572, the suburban tax increase would provide \$400 million to the RTA. The CTA would receive the lion’s share of this suburban tax increase – \$193.5 million. Metra would receive \$96.75 million and Pace would receive \$32.25 million. \$30 million would be placed in an “innovations” account to fund new transit projects, although there is no disbursement requirement for sharing funds among city and suburbs. Paratransit would also receive \$45.7 million under the suburban tax increase.

The collar county tax increase would come from the following counties:

- DuPage: \$47 million
- Lake: \$29 million
- Will: \$19 million
- Kane: \$16 million
- McHenry: \$9 million

“Suburban transit money should support planning for growing collar counties, compared to the loss of population in Chicago,” said Kirk. “Failure to fund Metra’s STAR line or the Union Pacific Northwest Line expansion project would result in millions of federal dollars being left on the table. The bipartisan Illinois congressional delegation won the battle against other states to line up federal funding for these congestion-fighting improvements. If the state cancels its local match, we will lose federal dollars, providing no hope for gridlocked commuters. To build our future economy, we have to fight gridlock in our new population center – suburban communities.”

The Commission heard testimony from Illinois Auditor General Director of Performance Audits Jim Schlouch regarding the Auditor General’s recent audit of transit board authorities. CTA President Ron Huberman provided details on proposed service cuts and funding requirements for the CTA rail and bus systems. State Reps. Sid Mathias and Kathy Ryg also discussed pending legislation in Springfield that would raise taxes on suburban families to meet transit budget shortfalls.

Congressman Kirk and the Commission also questioned CTA President Ron Huberman regarding the implementation of Auditor General recommendations to address wasteful spending practices and boost system efficiency.

“I applaud President Huberman for taking swift action to cut costs at the CTA,” Congressman Kirk said. “The Mayor made a good choice in a new leader with energy to solve our CTA problems. I want to make sure that as we go forward, we strengthen the partnership between city and suburbs that will boost economic growth in Illinois.”

The Suburban Transportation Commission was created in April to address the changing demographics and transportation needs of suburban communities. Two-thirds of Chicagoland residents now live in suburban Cook and the collar counties. Understanding this new population center for the region, the Commission is conducting hearings on a variety of issues of importance to suburban communities, including public transportation, aviation and traffic congestion.

Kirk and Bean both vote on federal appropriations to support transportation projects in Illinois. Last year, the federal government provided \$280 million to the CTA, \$172 million to Metra and \$48 million to Pace. The Federal Highway Administration also provided over \$1 billion for Illinois roads. Federal studies show the average Chicagoland suburban commuter in our area is delayed 58 hours more per year, with commuting times up 57 percent.

*Sales tax revenue estimates are based on 2006 collections by county.